

# AFTER



# THOUGHTS

By Harold Umber, Editor

As I write this column, it is less than a week after the terrorist attacks that struck the nation on Tuesday, September 11. The face of horror bombards us from our television screens each night when we get home from work. Daily newspaper headlines and radio broadcasts reinforce our anger and resolve not to let zealots erode our freedoms through attacks on our citizens and institutions.

As an adult, I have been unable to deal with these events on an intellectual basis, but viscerally, I am affected in ways I can't begin to describe. I wonder about the affect of fear and uncertainty on the lives and values of our children and grandchildren. I wonder about the teaching of tolerance in the face of action by the intolerant.

It is difficult to write about everyday things in the face of the destruction wrought by those whose challenge to American values is manifested in the deaths of thousand of innocents. The effect of this bloody incursion into the nation's nervous system will test our patience, resolve and wisdom. Terrorism has shattered national innocence and it will make us more guarded, both physically and emotionally.

One is struck and humbled by the courage and perseverance of fire fighters, rescue workers, police, and volunteers, who, in the face of danger, anger and sorrow, go about their jobs performing extraordinary deeds at great risk to themselves. These people became the standard bearers of the nation's resolve, working through fears and tears hoping to save fellow human beings. If there was ever any doubt about the strength of the fabric woven through this nation's citizens let the doubters look at the people working to establish order out of the chaos that has been thrust upon us in the last few days.

In the weeks, months, and years ahead, as a nation, we will suffer our pain as we try to regain some semblance of normality in our daily lives. We will do that by doing things we may not really feel like doing. We will do these things alone or with friends and relatives who have grown more precious because someone has assaulted our family. We must take back those elements of daily living taken from us. It is essential that we do those things that we would normally do this time of year.

Yesterday I began reclaiming my spirit by spending time on the prairie. I drove east under low hanging clouds. When I reached Sterling it was raining and I decided to go north hoping to drive out of

it. It was a lonely road. I really didn't know what I was seeking except relief from my madding state of mind. I was comforted by the solidarity and faith expressed on lonely farms and in small towns by people whose spirit and compassion was draped in red, white, and blue from flag poles, house windows and car antennas. Yet, I saw few people out and about.

I went to a favorite grouse covert. My dogs led me to the top of a hill and a soft mound of dirt where I found a fresh track of another hunter, perhaps someone like me, someone trying to reconnect with the routine of daily life. On a normal day, I would have been disappointed but I took a certain satisfaction knowing that he had been there. We hunted a grassy ridge before dropping down to follow the edge of a harvested wheat field back to the car.

The prairie, green on gold, was alive and vibrant. Flocks of teal and gadwalls, on shallow marshes alongside the road, lifted and circled as we rolled by them. A red fox casually patrolled the edge of another roadside wetland. Hawks were everywhere: resting, soaring, hunting. Crows were on the move. Mourning doves gathered on power lines and fences near feeding fields they will soon abandon. I saw the first sandhill cranes of the season using a familiar pasture near harvested grain fields. On one of three short walks, I heard the distant sound of a shotgun but saw no other hunters. All was right with the prairie.

The day was waning when we started home and the knot in my stomach had loosened. We hadn't worked very hard but we had managed to vent some energy and perhaps, in my case, some of the emotion I had been guarding these past days. Feeling the prairie in transition and hunting with my dogs on land that I do not own, for wild birds held in common, took on new importance simply because I was free to do it.

This nation has taken a terrible blow, but it will bounce back because its citizens are resilient and essential to the way it functions. Our democracy rests on values guarded by a Constitution that projects freedom and fixes responsibility so citizens can govern themselves and protect their interests. To do that most effectively we must do the everyday things that are important to us and reclaim the joy and laughter that was taken from us.

Count your blessings.